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A HISTORY

OF THE LAST HUNDRED DAYS OF ENGLISH
FREEDOM,

Ending with the passing of the Absolute-
Power-of-Imprisonment Act, in the
month of March, 1817.

Addressed to

Mr. John Goldsmith, of Hambledon, and
Mr. Richard Hinxman, of Chilling,

Who were

The Chairman and Seconder at the Meet-
ing of the People of Hampshire, on
Portsdown Hill, in the month of Fe-
bruary, 1817, to Petition for a redress
of grievances, and for a Reform in the
Commons House of Parliament.

LETTER IV.

*On the extraordinary conduct of Sir
Francis Burdett, during the last Winter,
on his motion for a Committee, and on his
Speech at the Westminster Dinner, on the
23d of May last.*

North-Hampstead, Long-Island,
July 23, 1817.

MY WORTHY AND BELOVED FRIENDS,

In my last I treated of what passed in
the Parliament at its opening in January
last. It was my intention, in this Letter,
to go into the history of the proceedings
of the *Green Bag Committee*; but, upon
reflection, I choose, rather, first to ex-
amine, a little, the mysterious part which
our great Leader, SIR FRANCIS BUR-
DETT, acted upon that memorable occa-
sion; and, in the pursuing of this course,
I am, in a greater measure, determined, by
the account which has reached me of his

*motion on the subject of Reform, of the
20th of May last, and which motion was
precisely the thing which the Reformers
disliked, and against which they have
uniformly protested for years past, and of
which I shall speak more fully by-and-
by.*

And here let me observe, that the past
conduct of no man, however meritorious,
ought, for one moment, to be put in com-
petition with the good of our country. It
is our duty to examine freely the acts of
Sir Francis Burdett, as well as the acts of
Castlereagh himself. Indeed, the plain
truth is this, that a clear statement rela-
tive to the conduct of Sir Francis, during
the last winter, is absolutely necessary to
rescue the character of all the Reformers
from the charge of folly approaching to-
wards madness. And, it now plainly
comes to this: either *he does not belong to
us, or we are the most inconsistent of hu-
man beings*, and our prayers are worthy
of not the smallest degree of attention.

I am well aware of the ten thousand
calumnies, that the performance of this
duty will give rise to. I am aware that
I shall be accused of dipping my pen in
poison to inflict a deadly wound on the
man, whose services to his country I
have so often extolled. And, though it
be my intention to inflict no wound;
though I shall have the most respectful
and the most kind feelings towards the
individual constantly in my heart, though
I shall say not one word, which truth,
which the good of my country, and which
justice to my own character, do not all
imperiously call for; though I shall deny
myself every aid which I might derive
from private communications; though no-
thing which has passed between Sir
Francis and me, or others *privately*, shall

be brought in to enforce any thing that I may have to say ; still I am aware that I shall be charged with every thing that the tongue of calumny can utter. But, even this shall never induce me to imitate the *example*, which, in the minds of a great majority of mankind, would fully justify me in making public *all* that has ever passed between us.

I will resort to a statement of no *facts*, which are not already well known to numerous persons, and which the public might not have known as well as I. I shall very clearly, or, at least, as clearly as I am able, give an account of this gentleman's conduct, during the time that I have mentioned ; and I shall inquire very freely into the motives of that conduct.

That I have a *right* to do this is evident, and I think it will soon appear, that it is a *duty* as well as a right. It is a duty towards myself ; but, what is that, compared with the duty which I owe my country ; and which I owe, in a more particular manner, to those millions of men who have read my writings, and who have shown their attachment to me by every mark within their power ! But, here again will come the old charge of my "*inconsistency*." My "*change of opinion*" will be again blazoned forth. What change ? The change is not in *my opinion*, but, as I shall show, in the conduct of the person spoken of. OTHELLO in one act of the play praises IAGO for his honesty, fidelity, and knowledge ; but, at the close of the drama, he exclaims : " perfidious, damned IAGO ! " No critic has ever thought of accusing Othello of either *inconsistency* or *injustice*. The merchant, who, to day, confides the keeping of his strong box to his Clerk, and who, to morrow, accuses him of theft, and pursues him to the gallows, is never accused of *inconsistency*. It was IAGO who

was inconsistent ; it is the Clerk who is inconsistent ; and not Othello and the Merchant.

Besides, it is not my intention to deal in *accusations* against Sir Francis Burdett. I impute to him no crimes ; I charge him with no perfidy ; I insinuate nothing foul against him. His conduct I impute to those weaknesses in man's nature which the far greater part of mankind will be ready to excuse ; but, those weaknesses must be stated, or the character of Reform and of the Reformers must be blackened, which latter, nature as well as reason cry aloud in my heart and tell me, that, if I have the power to prevent it, I ought not to permit it. Moreover, my object also is to induce Sir Francis to return to the old path. He has by no means forfeited any portion of my good opinion as far as regards his honesty and his love of the liberties of his country. It is of his *indecision* and his *inconsistency*, of his *jealousies* and of his *envies*, of which I complain ; and of all these a man may, by an effort of which any man is capable, easily cure himself.

The "*good of the cause*," I shall, by some, be told, demands *silence* and *oblivion* ; that the common enemy will be pleased to see this *disunion*. But, the disunion *has taken place*, and, this was known to the Boroughmongers, and this it was that rendered them bold. So that the question is singly this : shall the cause of the People be sacrificed to the schisms, or the indecision, or the jealousies, or the envies, or any other of the weaknesses of Sir Francis Burdett ; or shall it not ? I answer in the negative ; and, upon that ground, I now proceed to inquire into his conduct, during the last winter.

It is very notorious that the Reformers looked up to Sir Francis Burdett as the man who was to be the great advocate of their cause in *Parliament*. Indeed, the

calls which he had been making upon *the People*, for so many years, *to come forward in a body*, naturally led to the universal opinion that he would be transported with joy, when he found that they had actually come forward in far greater numbers, and with demonstrations of greater knowledge, zeal, and resolution, than he ever could have anticipated. Strange to say, the reverse was the fact, and that, in the precise degree that he perceived the people to wax warm, he appeared to wax cold; and to see nothing but obstacles in the pursuit of that, to the full accomplishment of which he had always declared that nothing but the hearty and unanimous good will of the People was wanting. While all was life and hope amongst the Reformers, he remained, as it were, entombed at Brighthelmstone and at Hastings, amidst a circle of that very Standing Army, the bare sight of which, one would have thought, was enough to blast his sight.

There he remained until late in December, or, rather, early in January; while millions of men were anxiously looking, from every corner of the country, to know what he meant to do, and how he meant to proceed in bringing forward their cause to a decision. People were surprised that *no Meeting took place in Westminster*. What! Palace Yard, which had been the very focus of Reform, and which had been sending forth its burning rays so long, NOW, when all the rest of the nation was in a blaze, to become dead and cold as a horse-pond! The holding up of his finger would have produced a Meeting at Westminster, and yet no meeting took place, though it was very eagerly called for by many most respectable persons, and though an occasion loudly called for it, independent of the cause of Reform; namely, the imprisonment of my LORD COCHRANE. It

was anxiously desired that a *public Meeting*, and not one at a *Tavern*, should have taken place upon that occasion. Preparations were actually made for such a Meeting. Nay, the requisition for it was sent to the High Bailiff. But, strange to tell, the Meeting dwindled into a *Tavern* size by the refusal of Sir Francis to attend it. This fact soon became public, and a most injurious effect it had. Lord Cochrane had acquired great and well-founded popularity for his manly conduct at the London Tavern, when he blew the sinecure-soup project into a . . . The *real causes* of his sufferings were now become known to every man; and his gallant perseverance, and disregard of suffering, had gained him wonderful applause. The *Penny Subscription*, set on foot to pay his fine, had excited an enthusiasm that never was surpassed, and in which all ranks, except tax-eaters, participated. There was never such a meeting in Westminster as that would have been. And was it patriotic in Sir Francis to prevent that Meeting? Would *his* popularity have suffered because another man received marks of popularity?

When Sir Francis came to London, early in January, *then*, at any rate, we expected to learn what were his precise intentions. In this, however, we were disappointed; though it was impossible for us to believe that he would not, *at the opening of the Session*, give notice of his intention to *bring in a Bill* for a Reform. The idea of a motion, for the *dozenth* time, *for a Committee* to inquire about the necessity of a Reform, was scouted by us all, not only as ridiculous in itself, but as manifestly *deceptious* and *mischievous* in its tendency. But, of this, more by-and-by. We could have no doubt that a *Bill was intended*; and though we had great reason to complain of the sluggishness of our Chief, none of us doubted, as

yet, that he would, in the distinct terms of a bill, move for what we wanted and for what we were praying for. It was not more long speeches that we wanted. It was something *to the point*; something that we might rally round till we obtained our object.

There was, at the period now alluded to, a degree of hope and enthusiasm prevailing, such as had never before been witnessed. Like a salamander in the fire, Sir Francis appeared untouched by the blaze of public spirit that shone around him, and the ardour of which was all directed towards himself. He appeared like a lover who had passed the honey-moon, or rather like VAINLOVE, in one of CONGREVE'S Plays, who, as another character terms it, delighted in *springing the Covey*, and then abandoning the sport, for instead of being at his house in London, to answer the numerous eager inquiries of zealous and honest men from all parts of the country, he was, we were told, hunting in Surrey, with the hounds of MABERLY, the ARMY TAYLOR! This circumstance alone, which I found to be *truly* stated, was enough to excite *suspicion*; and, it did excite, in my mind, very strong suspicions, or rather, it confirmed those suspicions which (for reasons by-and-by to be stated) I had conceived before he came to London.

As the day for opening the Parliament approached, his house was, of course, more and more resorted to by Reformers from all parts of the country; and, this was precisely the time, these momentous days were precisely those days, which he selected for *spending in Leicestershire a fox-hunting*! Why, I loved the country, and hated London quite as cordially as he did. I could have written, too, at Botley, just as well as in London; but, I thought it my duty, or, rather, I *thought* nothing about the matter; I *felt* that I could not,

at such a time, be absent from the place of grand resort without committing something very little short of a crime. If, indeed, he had been fixed in his purpose to *bring in the Bill*, his absence might have been prudent to avoid solicitations on the other side. But, the real motive of so perfectly voluntary an absence became but too apparent in the sequel: that is to say, to avoid our importunities to keep up the mark of our wishes; a motive which became the more obvious, when it was considered, that he had left his Son, whose illness had 'til then been the ostensible cause of his absence, and had also left all his family, in Sussex, while he took his line of March to the North.

The day of the meeting of Parliament was now at hand. The town was crowded with new faces and anxious hearts from all parts of the kingdom. He being absent, and no one being able to tell when he would return, the houses of major Cartwright and myself became the scenes of inquiry and information. In answer to the eager questions about Sir Francis, we held out a confident reliance upon his coming in time to carry down the petitions and to give his notice to *move* for leave to bring in a bill. The major really expected this, and though I *did not*, I thought it my duty to hold out *hope* to the last possible moment. In the mean while the *deputies*, called together by a paper, *signed by Sir Francis himself*, met, came to certain resolutions as to what *sort of a bill* it ought to be; but, at the same time, resolving that *they had so entire a confidence* in the integrity and wisdom of Sir Francis, that they were willing to leave the *details* of the bill to him.

Day after day passed, and no news from Leicestershire! The eve of the Parliament's meeting brought no Sir Francis! Nay, the morning brought no comfort; nothing to cheer the half-distracted crowds

of bearers of petitions, who had come up in the full expectation of being received by him with open arms, and who longed even for a sight of him. In this state of things, and at about ten o'clock in the morning of the day of opening, I went to major Cartwright's, who had about a dozen of the bearers of petitions in the room with him, and who had told them, that **he had** received a letter from Sir Francis, saying that he would be with him that morning, and that he, the Major, expected him to arrive every minute. "Sir," said I, "I will not disguise from these gentlemen my real opinion. I have, for some weeks, suspected, and I have told *you* my suspicion, that Sir Francis Burdett will not give Notice of a Bill, and that he will make no great and bold effort in our cause. And I do not believe, that he will call upon you to-day; I do not believe, that he will carry down any petitions to-day; I do not believe, that he will make any stand for us in the House; and I advise these gentlemen to carry their petitions to **LORD COCHRANE**, who, I have authority to say, will give Notice of a Bill, if Sir Francis does not."

The audience were astounded at my words. Many of them had received positive instructions to deliver them *into the hands of Sir Francis Burdett alone*. They were at a loss what to do. But, at last, as many of them as could be found, assembled at Charing Cross, in the manner described in my last letter to you, and proceeded with their petitions to the House of **LORD COCHRANE**, who, as I have there described, was carried into Westminster Hall with the Bristol petition in his arms, and with the resolution in his mind to give *Notice of a Bill*, if Sir Francis Burdett did not.

Here I should observe, that his Lordship, *who is timid only when there is no*

real danger, and bold only when there is real danger, for a long time resisted our importunities to give notice of a Bill, chiefly upon the ground, that it would be done with so much more and so much better effect by his colleague. But, answered we, your Lordship is convinced that it *ought to be done*; that our only chance of success, at this time, depends upon this one act, done in a bold manner; and, will you suffer the cause of the people to be deprived of this chance, rather than not do the thing yourself; that people, who have shown so much zeal in *your* cause; who have resented so boldly all your wrongs; who have been ever ready to stand by you to the last? Does your Lordship think it *just*, that the cause should wait the good pleasure, the leisure hours, or the whim of any man living? Do you think, that the thousands of men, any of whom would do the thing, were they in Parliament, as ably as Sir Francis Burdett, will be satisfied with your declining to do it, merely out of deference to him? Do you think, that *the people* of Westminster, who have placed it in your power to do so much for the country, will be satisfied with your doing nothing, because your colleague will do nothing?

His Lordship was convinced, that it was his duty to do it; and, how he came *not* to do it remains to be explained, and forms the most curious part of this most curious history. When my Lord Cochrane arrived in the House, *Sir Francis was there*, and had GIVEN A NOTICE, but, of what *sort* Lord Cochrane could not, probably, distinctly learn. SIR FRANCIS, who, as I had predicted, had *not called upon Major Cartwright*, had taken, also, such special care not to come in contact with any Reformer, that he actually came *in a straight line from Leicestershire to the door of the Honourable House in a*

post-chaise, and passed by the end of New Palace Yard, just at the time when the thousands of people were carrying Lord Cochrane to the door of that House! He would naturally expect, from this indication, that his Lordship had been chosen to occupy his place as to the *Bill*, about which we were so anxious; and, before his Lordship, who, on account of the crowd, moved slowly, could arrive and take his place, he, Sir Francis, had given his *Notice for a Committee*; that is to say, for what the French call a *parler pour parler*, and what we call a *talk for talk sake*; or, in this case, for a giving of the thing *the go-by*! When, therefore, Lord Cochrane, agreeably to his promise, asked Sir Francis whether he was about to give his notice, the latter answered, that he had given it. After this, for Lord Cochrane to give any Notice upon the same subject, would have been at once to proclaim a division between them; and, therefore, he did not do it.

I am loath to call this acting the part of the *dog in the manger*; and I beg of you, my good friends, who have been as great admirers of Sir Francis Burdett as any body in the kingdom, to give to this act the most mild association of epithets and terms that your justice will permit you to employ. But willing as I should be to stop short of direct censure, it is impossible for me, without first divesting myself of all feeling for the suffering nation and its cause, to speak in any terms short of direct censure of the greater part of Sir Francis's conduct subsequent to this epoch.

We have seen, in former Letters, that the Prince's Speech had, for its main object, to reprobate the Reformers, and to produce *new laws* to put them down, or, at least, to reduce them to silence. The following words, at the close of the speech,

could leave no doubt of this in the mind of any man living. I have quoted these words before, but they must find a place here, in order to a clear understanding of what is to follow: "In considering our internal situation, you will, I doubt not, feel a just indignation at the attempts which have been made to take advantage of the distresses of the country, for the purpose of exciting a spirit of sedition and violence. I am too well convinced of the loyalty and good sense of the great body of his Majesty's subjects, to believe them capable of being perverted by the arts which are employed to seduce them; but I am determined to omit no precautions for preserving the public peace, and for counteracting the designs of the disaffected: and I rely with the utmost confidence, on your cordial support and co-operation in upholding a system of law and government, from which we have derived inestimable advantages, which has enabled us to conclude, with unexampled glory, a contest whereon depended the best interests of mankind, and which has been hitherto felt by ourselves, as it is acknowledged by other nations, to be the most perfect that has ever yet fallen to the lot of any people."

Was it not of the very first importance, that these assertions and these propositions, should be instantly met with flat contradiction and with decided reprobation? Did not all the world see, the moment they saw this speech, what the Ministers were driving at? Could Sir Francis Burdett, then, have any doubt upon this subject? Must he not have been certain, that Gagging Bills were intended in order to silence those, whom he had for many years been reproaching for their silence upon this very subject? And yet he suffered a two-days debate upon this

subject to pass over, *without ever saying one single word in disapprobation of any part of it!* Though, as every man must have seen, this was the time, and the *only* time, to meet and rebut these unfounded charges against the Reformers, and to give the alarm as to the measures about to be hatched and brought forth. During this long debate there was no species of abuse that was not heaped upon the Reformers; their meetings, their petitions, their speeches, their *publications*. All these were called venomous, seditious, blasphemous, rebellious. And, all this he heard without one single word in our defence! Nay, what is, if possible, worse, he declined, or, rather, *refused*, to say one word in our defence, when a proposition to do so was offered to be brought forward, *and actually was brought forward by another!*

During the debate on the Speech, LORD COCHRANE, seeing no one willing to make a stand, or even to utter a word, in our defence, and knowing, as every man must have known, what the close of the Speech aimed at, moved the following amendment to the address:—"That this
 " House has taken a view of the public
 " proceedings, throughout the country,
 " by those persons, who have met to petition for a Reform of this House, and
 " that, in justice to those persons as well
 " as to the people at large, and for the
 " purpose of convincing the people that
 " this House wishes to entertain and encourage no misrepresentation of their
 " honest intentions, this House, with
 " great humility, beg leave to assure his
 " Royal Highness, that they have not
 " been able to discover one single instance, in which meetings to petition
 " for Parliamentary Reform have been
 " accompanied with any attempt to dis-

turb the public tranquillity; and this
 " House further beg leave to assure his
 " Royal Highness, that, in order to prevent the necessity of those rigorous
 " measures, which are contemplated in
 " the latter part of the Speech of his
 " Royal Highness, this house will take
 " into their early consideration the propriety of abolishing sinecures and un-
 " merited pensions and grants, the reduction of the civil list, and of all salaries
 " which are now disproportionate to the
 " services, and especially, that they will
 " take into their consideration the Reform
 " of this House, agreeably to the laws and
 " constitution of the land, this House
 " being decidedly of opinion that justice
 " and humanity, as well as policy, call,
 " at this time of universal distress, for
 " measures of conciliation, and not of
 " rigour, towards a people who have made
 " so many and so great sacrifices, and
 " who are now suffering, in consequence
 " of those sacrifices, all the calamities
 " with which a nation can be afflicted."

Now, though it is very well known that this amendment would not have been *carried*, it is also well known, that a debate would have grown out of it, in which debate would have come naturally under review all the conduct of the Reformers, all their Petitions and Publications, and that *here* might have been fought a glorious battle against the intended measures. In short, if this battle had been fought by Sir Francis Burdett with resolution and boldness, the Ministers would have been checked at the out-set. The People would have been encouraged; they would have petitioned against the measures that followed upon the heels of the Speech; and, I verily believe, that the State Dungeons would now have been empty, and that I should not have been

in exile. But, instead of *fighting a battle* upon these grounds, so fair and so advantageous, Sir Francis Burdett *did not even second the motion*, so that it dropped dead without ever being put from the chair! And, what was his excuse for not having seconded this motion, upon which, perhaps, the liberties of the country hung? Why, that he was out in the gallery when it was put, and was *going home*. This he told you, People of Westminster, in Palace Yard; but, he did not tell you, that *he had seen the motion before*, and that *he knew it was going to be made*! True, he was absent when the motion was made; but WHY was he absent?

This is not the way in which Sir Francis Burdett has been *treated by the PEOPLE*. He has been put into Parliament by a subscription, not of the RUSSELLS and others, of whose acquaintance and support he now boasts, but of the Reformers *all over England*! Did the people treat him thus, when he stood for Middlesex? Did they treat him thus, when he was sent to the Tower; or, when he came out of the Tower? Have they ever abandoned him for one single moment? Have they ever drawn off *from him*, when his enemies have called him violent and seditious? And, as to the publications of the Reformers, which he tacitly suffered to be loaded with every species of abuse; has *he ever been abandoned by those publications*? Have those publications ever been *silent* when he was an object of calumny? Yet he could sit out two whole debates as a mouse in a cheese, while these publications were represented as "*venom*," and while their authors were marked out as fit objects for the dungeon! Let us hope, if we can, that his future conduct may be such as to cause this to be *forgiven*; but, I frankly avow, that, by me, it can never be *forgotten*. I refrain from imputing this silence,

upon such an occasion, to *ingratitude*, because that is the blackest of crimes; but, to *what* am I to impute it? To talk of "*indolence*;" to talk of "*sluggishness*;" to talk of "*inadvertence*;" to talk of any of these, in such a case, is to insult common sense in the manner the most gross. The poor creatures in the Black-Hole of Calcutta were obliged to submit to suffocation, because the vizier was *asleep*, and no one dared to disturb his repose! But, was it thus that the people of England were to suffer, because Sir Francis Burdett, who owed them so much, was not disposed to open his mouth? When charged with this neglect of duty by Mr. HUNT, at a subsequent Meeting in Palace Yard, he said, that he had often heard of Members being blamed for what they *had done*; but that he never before heard of any Member being censured for *what he had not done*. No: but, surely, he must often have heard of men being not only *blamed*, but *punished*, for *not having done* certain things; and he will find, I believe, that *not to denounce* a treason, of which we have knowledge, is a crime punishable with death by the law of the land. So that this was an attempt to parry the charge by a mere turn of expression. What! in the catalogue of offences against our country, does no such thing as a *neglect of duty* find a place? And, when Sir Francis Burdett was elected for Westminster, did not the patriotic people of that City, expect him to *do something* for them? Yes; they expected him to be the great champion of the cause of liberty, and more especially of the cause of Reform. Was not this the case? Will any man deny that this was the ground of all our exertions, our votes and subscriptions? And, was he not bound, then, to act agreeably to this clearly understood compact; or, to resign his seat? He cannot give us a Re-

form of the Parliament. I know that very well. Our plan of Reform, though standing upon the very principles, which he has so long inculcated, he might not *now* approve of. But, could he not have opened his lips in defence of our conduct, when that conduct was so perfectly legal, that the Law Officers of the Crown, with their two pair of sharp eyes, could find nothing in that conduct to prosecute? Well! but suppose us Reformers to have become *too violent* for his more sober years. Was the personal freedom of all the rest of the nation of consequence not sufficient to call forth a word from him? He did oppose the Bills *afterwards*; and so did Lord Milton, who was one of the Green-Bag Committee, and who voted for *new laws* in that Committee. Oh, no! It was not *subsequent harangues* that were wanted. It was a gallant fight at the outset; and, besides, never, from first to last, though such numerous opportunities were offered, did he utter *one single syllable in our defence*, but, on the contrary, by dealing in vague generalities, seemed to allow, *that our conduct was not to be defended*. Let us hope, my good friends in England, that we shall live to see the day, when we shall not stand in need of *him* for a defender! If he did not toss us down to be worried by the Ministers, he, at any rate, stood and looked on as an uninterested spectator.

Doubtless, there would have been bills of *some sort* passed, in spite of all that he could have done. But, is it likely, that if he had fought our battle, in the manner that it might have been fought, and that he was so well able to fight it, is it likely, that if this had been done, *the same measures* would have been proposed? At any rate, he was in a place where he *dared speak out*; where he ran no risk in describing those measures in

their true colours; where he could have proposed *resolutions*, which he was *sure* would be *seconded*; and where he could have placed upon indelible record the infamous conduct of our enemies. And, was it not a neglect of an imperious duty, *not to do this*? There were hundreds of those men, whom he thus abandoned to the rage of the boroughmongers, who would have done all this, and more than all this, and who would have done it *well too*. This he knew; and sorry I am to say, that I believe, that this knowledge led him to see, without any great regret, if not with inward satisfaction, *any measures* adopted, that were calculated to keep those men from being his competitors for popularity and for renown.

Other motives have been ascribed; but we shall find, I believe, upon a fair examination of his conduct, that all the indications of those other motives resolve themselves into so many concurrent presumptive proofs of this all-devouring and destructive motive. It was, indeed, subject of wonder and of astonishment, when his son became an officer in that very standing army, against the practices in which, and against the very existence of which, the father had, all his life long, been so loudly inveighing. For my part, when I first heard of the fact, I treated it as one of the lies of the day, intended for twenty-four hours, to injure the character of Sir Francis. What then, was my astonishment; what was my sorrow, when I not only found, that his son was in the standing army, but, that he was in *the prince's own regiment*, and serving under those very *German officers*, to employ whom in such a capacity, *is notoriously a daring violation of the law*! Had the son, led away by the military madness of the day, and, possibly, decoyed by some of his companions amongst the

aristocracy, who would naturally wish to give pain to, and excite suspicions respecting the father, dashed into the ranks *in time of war*, in search of "honourable scars." Even in that case, the circumstance must have awakened some degree of suspicion. But, here is a *joining of a standing army in time of peace*, the very existence of which the father has reprobated in every term of reprobation. The commission might, *possibly* be dated before the close of the war; but, Mr. Burdett did not join his regiment till peace; and, besides, there was no law to compel him to remain in it, and to be liable to be ordered out, at any moment, to draw his sword, and order his men to fire upon the people. This very young man, when six years younger, saw his father dragged from his house, and escorted to the Tower, by a part of this very standing army. Nay, the youth himself accompanied the father in the same coach, on that memorable occasion. We were at that time told, in the public prints, that "at the moment when the soldiers forced the doors of the house, Sir Francis was standing reading *Magna Charta* to his son in *Latin*." One would have thought, that these circumstances would have been imprinted in the mind and on the heart of this young man to his latest breath. One would have thought, that he would have begged his bread from door to door, rather than have served in that same standing army, and that, too, under the sway of the very same set of ministers.

But, you will say, "might not the son enter the army without the father's consent, even in spite of his remonstrances?" Undoubtedly he might, and though I *know nothing of the matter*, I really believe, that the step never received the father's consent. The account, which some very zealous political friends

of Sir Francis give of the matter is this: They say, that the wife of Courtts, the banker, who is Sir Francis's father-in-law, obtained the consent of the *Duke of York* to dine at her house, along with a parcel of his army-people, as a sort of giving a sanction of the *great* to visit her, she having lately quitted the avocation of play-actress, and having, from ardour of affection, no doubt, married Courtts not many days (less than twenty, I believe,) after the mother of Lady Burdett was cold. Whether this scheme of introducing her to the *great* succeeded, or not, I never inquired; though I should rather suppose it did not, seeing what numerous news-paper paragraphs we have read in praise of the lady's *acts of charity*, which acts, of course, the sharp-sighted news-paper people discovered of themselves, and blazened forth to the world from a mere sense of morality and religion, and without the smallest desire of ever being *paid* for the insertion. Oh, Lord! no! not they! But, whether the scheme succeeded, or not; or whether there really was ever such a scheme, I am not certain; but, of the *fact* of the Duke of York's *visits*, the news-papers took care to inform us in as prominent a way as even Mrs. Courtts herself could have wished. These vehicles informed us, too, that Lady Burdett and Sir Francis did *not* visit the new mother-in-law; but, that Sir Francis's son *did* visit her, and it is generally understood, that that son, who is the heir at law to Sir Francis's title, and to a great part of his immense estates, is also to be the possessor of the far greater part of Courtts's, perhaps a half a million of money; but, this, of course, must depend wholly on the pleasure of Courtts, or, perhaps, partly on that of Mrs. Courtts.

Now, it is said by the friends of Sir Francis, (for I never had a word from

his lips on the subject,) that, at one of these visits of the Duke, the *commission* was offered to Mr. Burdett, and that he accepted of it without his father's consent, and even without his knowledge. All which is so natural and so probable that I never hesitated, for one moment, to give it my entire belief. It is so obvious, that the Duke of York, and even the Prince, whose consent must have been obtained, because he is the colonel of the regiment, would wish to have this young man *in their hand*, that there needs not one word on the subject of the *reasons* for that wish. And, on the other hand, it is impossible not to see thousands of reasons for Sir Francis's shuddering at this destination of his only son.

As we are proceeding upon the supposition of a *non-consenting* father, we must carry along with us the idea of an *undutiful son*. Yet, let us not judge too harshly. The advice of a woman, who had been able so completely to subdue the heart, and, what is more, open the hand of a thrifty banker, in, I believe, the seventy-ninth year of his age, together with the affable kindness of royalty, whose notice, even in the way of a bare look, so many covet, may well be thought too powerful for the head of almost any young man of fashion. Therefore, when Mr. Burdett was, in consequence of a fall from his gig, lying, as was supposed, at death's door at Brighton, it was natural for his father to fly to him, however much he might be displeased with his conduct; for, if we can, as I sincerely do, see fair ground of apologies crowd into the mind of a tender father, and a father too, who, in spite of his apparent coldness, yields, I am well persuaded, to very few men in the world in kindness of heart.

Speaking of him as a man in private life, there never was a more sincerely

compassionate man than Sir Francis Burdett. There is no suffering creature, for whom he does not feel. To regard, therefore, his long continuance in the hated barracks at Brighton, where he had a child to be saved from death; to regard this as an indication of his having consented to his son becoming part of the standing army in time of peace, is to be guilty of great injustice. Nor, while his son's life was in danger, do I think that any blame attached to him for his total neglect of all public affairs. If we readily excuse a labouring man for being absent from *his* work when he has a child at the point of death, why should we not excuse Sir Francis Burdett, whose mind must have been wholly taken up with this one object? Therefore, every unfavourable conclusion, drawn from this absence at Brighton, I set down as unjust, except in as much as that absence was continued longer after Mr. Burdett was recovered, and, a part of the time of which continued absence, as the newspapers informed us, was occupied in the diversion of *hunting with the Prince's hounds*, while the reformers, in all parts of the country were in action, and were burning with impatience to know what measures Sir Francis had resolved on, in order, that all might pull together, as offering the only ground of hope of success.

This absence, and the total *silence* that accompanied it, gave rise to suspicions, and the circumstance of the son's being *in the army*, and in the prince's own regiment, was now dwelt upon by every one as a symptom of a fatal change in the father's mind; for, in the distant parts of the country, the honest reformers knew no more about Coutts and his wife, than they did about the old man in the moon; nor, indeed, quite so much; for

they did know, that they had heard their grandmothers' say, that there was such a man as the man in the moon, and they never heard there was such a man as Coutts. They judged, as they naturally would, and as they had a right to do, from the *naked fact*. They had undoubted proof, that Sir Francis Burdett's son was gone into the standing army; they found Sir Francis absent, hunting with the prince's hounds, and silent as to the subject of reform. And how were they to draw any *other* conclusion, than that he had given his consent to the taking of a commission by his son?

Ready as I am to acquit Sir Francis of having given this consent; ready as I am to apologize for the conduct of his son, I must not, however, forget, that there is a duty here which was due from Sir Francis to his country, regarding, as he did, the cause of reform, the cause of his country. It was his duty, and his bounden duty, to *make known to the nation*, that he had *not given his consent*. Will he say, that the *public* had *no right* to demand an account of any of his *family affairs*? This would be going very far, even if the affair was a *family* one. For, it is possible to suppose a case, in which a mere family affair might be deeply interesting to a public cause. Suppose, for instance, Castlereagh were to become widower, and that Sir Francis, (God forgive me for the supposition!) were to bestow the hand of one of his daughters upon the Noble Viscount! This would be purely a family affair. And yet I imagine, that no one will attempt to deny, that the people must be extremely doltish, if they thought it of no consequence to them. Suppose my two eldest sons were now to go to England, and that one of them were to become under secretary to Sidmouth, and the other one of his police justices, and they were, as of course they would,

to set to work to carry the Gagging Bills into execution; and, suppose I were to remain *silent* upon the subject. What would *you*, my good friends, think of *me*? I dare not attempt to describe my *thoughts*; but I know that the utmost stretch of your kindness would be required to induce you to content yourselves with saying, that I should do well to say not another word about my love of country, till this mysterious matter was cleared up. Well then, if this is what the kindest of my kind friends would say to *me*; in virtue of what moral principle, of what rule of right, of what exemption or privilege known amongst men, is the nation not to say *the same* to Sir Francis Burdett? But, still the cases are by no means analogous. The nation's claim upon Sir Francis is far, very far, superior to any claim that even any portion of the nation has upon me. You, my good friends, and all my countrymen in a body, have a claim upon me for that attachment, which is due to my country, and which unsophisticated nature bids every man bear towards his country; and this attachment you have a right to call upon me to show by the exertion of my talents, as far as is consistent with the safety of myself and my family. But, besides this claim, which the nation has upon all of us, the whole nation and the reformers in particular, have special and peculiar claims upon Sir Francis Burdett, who has entered into a *positive contract* with them; who has been supported in his public character by their votes and by their subscriptions, and, who, in return, has a thousand times pledged himself to maintain their cause. I am bound by no such ties; and yet, in the case above supposed, you would, I am sure, regard an explanation from me a bounden duty. All I ask, therefore, is, that, in taking the most lenient course, you

will decide on the conduct of Sir Francis Burdett, in this respect, as you would decide on my conduct.

As to the story, in January, about Sir Francis being about to be *called* up to the House of Peers, or, at least, that, in case of his refusal, his lady was to become a Countess in her own right with remainder to her son, it was a story, which though never publicly contradicted, I never for one moment, believed; for, as old WHITFIELD once told his congregation, "no man *prays to be damned*;" and as, for *forcing* the thing upon him, or upon lady Burdett, a BÉCILEAU'S bishop flung his blessing, out of *pure spite*, at a Jesuit, who had crept under a bench in the church in order to avoid it, the thing was too ridiculous not to make the nation choke with laughter.

Nevertheless I do believe, that the courtly air of Brighton had *some* effect upon Sir Francis. The very purlieus of a court barrack are pestilential, as to political principle. Surrounded by crafty courtiers in the garb of frank and thoughtless military officers,—listening to the praises bestowed on a beloved son, about whose health he was so anxious; and receiving, perhaps, personal condolence from the Prince himself. Under such circumstances, and in the moments of incaution, men commit themselves before they reflect on what they are doing, and they are, by slow degrees, led to do things, which they would, at first, have shuddered but to think of. It was just at this moment, that the blaze of Reform burst forth; and that, in every part of the country, knowledge and talent seemed to be possessed by almost every man that opened his lips at a public meeting.

Sir Francis Burdett is a *sensible* man. No man's character was ever more misunderstood generally than his. He is a sober, reflecting, and even profound man; and his love to his country would be exceeding that of any man I ever knew, except the brave old Major Cartwright, were it not for this ill judged ambition. This ambition will suffer *no competitor*, and especially in the capacity of *orator*,

in which he falls beneath so many hundreds. I forget, who it is that writes a fable about the thanksgiving of the animals to Jupiter. The peacock returned thanks for his *sweet voice*, the hog for his *cleanliness*, the viper for his *harmless nature*, and so on. And, it does frequently happen that nature, in her freaks, makes men so perverse as to think little of their talents which they really possess, and to think unconsionably highly of talents, in which every one but themselves, can see that they are deficient.

It has always been the passion of Sir Francis Burdett to be *at the head*, and not only to be at the head, but to have *no degrees of approach towards him*, and especially in the capacity of speech-maker, a talent beneath notice, when compared with the great and solid powers of mind which he possesses. To hear him by the side of his breakfast table; to hear the fine and consequent reasoning! the profound remarks, and the simple and strong language that comes from his lips; and, in a few hours afterwards to find this, as it were, wholly forgotten, and to hear him, sometimes labouring till he is out of breath in the utterance of sentences two minutes long, each containing in its belly two or three parentheses, and each of these two or three little ones one within another, as *Swift* calls it, "like a nest of pill boxes," while the sentence closes, at last, without any memory being able to collect its ideas into any rational point or conclusion, and leaving no other impression upon the minds of his hearers, than that which is produced by declamatory rant; and, at other times, vainly aiming at levity and sarcastic wit; and interlarding his own trifling matter with far-fetched scraps of Latin and of Plays; to hear him thus, in these two different situations, is enough to make any sensible man avoid the rock of misguided ambition. Sir Francis Burdett may be well assured, whatever some persons may say to this, that this is the opinion of every man, who is enough sincerely his friend to lament his misconception of his talents. I could name a score off hand, who have

expressed the same opinion, and in almost the very same words that I have now made use of.

But, why did I never say this before? If any one asks this silly question, my answer is, that these are things which brothers do not say to brothers; and, as to saying it to the public, one reason, amongst a thousand others, is, that it would have done harm to our cause. Nor should I have said it now, if I had not regarded the saying it as necessary to our own defence in explaining the real motives of him, by whom we have been abandoned.

This propensity to shine as the one great man and great speech maker has led to all that I have to complain of. He saw, that a blaze of talent had burst forth. He saw, that, if a Reform really took place, he could be nothing in that line of talent. He could not endure the idea of standing amidst a crowd of second or third rates; therefore he began to halt, to consider—to hesitate—to damp. We were going *too fast*; we exceeded *his bounds*, who before, had *no bounds*. Till now he had been the undisputed chief; that pleased him well, and he zealously and sincerely strove for the victory. But, when he found that the victory, if soon, would leave him a disputed truncheon, he stopped short, and left us to the mercy of our foes, choosing rather to eke out his life as the *chief* of an unsuccessful, than to live an *associate* in a successful, cause.

Let us hope, that he will be disappointed in the former, and that his conduct will be such as to give him a large share of his country's gratitude in the accomplishing of the latter. But, if I am to judge from his recent conduct, that is to say, his prominent acts since I left England, there is, I am sorry to say it, very little ground for such hope. These acts are his motion of the 20th of May, for a committee of the whole House to *inquire* on the subject of Reform. I observed before, that this was a measure against which the Reformers all *protested* in the most decided manner. Indeed we were of opinion that such a step would amount to a tacit abandonment of our cause.

For what did such a motion argue? Why, that we *doubted*, or, that there was *room for doubt*, upon the subject. When we all declared, that the justice of our demand was "*as notorious as the sun at noonday*," and he? What had he said to justify his motion of *enquiry*? He had a thousand times publicly declared, in the House as well as out of it, that it, was *notoriously no representation of the People*. He had said that he hated to go to the House for two reasons; first because he disliked *bad company*, and next, because he disliked late hours. He had told the people in palace yard, that they ought never to call it by the *name* of the House of Commons; but, in his speeches in that same Palace Yard, he called it "*the Room over the way*," loading the whole body indiscriminately with every epithet and term expressive of baseness in them and of abhorrence in him! Nay, he had even gone so far as distinctly to recommend to the people "*not to petition the Room*" any longer, seeing that the said Room consisted of "*a band of notorious Oligarchs*." Was it not, then, an insult to the People, after all this to move this same "*Room*" to form itself into a Committee to *inquire* relative to the subject of Reform! It was about fourteen years that he had been, occasionally, making these talk-for-talk's sake motions; and the Reformers thought it high time to see something clear and specific proposed, especially as they had always been told, that no one could tell *what it was they wanted*. His reason (the only one that I ever heard of) for preferring the motion for a Committee, was, that it would be *presumption* in him to attempt to dictate to the House what sort of a Reform should be adopted. What! the "*Room*" become "*the House*" all at once, and a body, too, so respectable and so wise (as evinced by the happy result of its 25 year's measures, I suppose) as to make it presumption in him to appear to dictate to them, though it is done two or three hundred times in every session; that is to say, every time *any* member moves for leave to bring in *any bill*. But, what was well worthy of remark, while his modesty prevented him from

risking the imputation of dictating to "*the Room*," it was not sufficient to prevent him from dictating to *the people*, whom he had formerly taught to despise "*the Room*." A million and a half of men asked for a *Bill* and for *Universal Suffrage*; and he made a motion for a *committee* and would stop at the suffrage of House-holders; so there was he who had, hundreds and hundreds of times declared, that the People ought to *instruct* their representatives, presenting petitions, and acting in *open defiance* of the prayers of those petitions!

It is said (for the paper containing the report of the debate has not yet reached me, though papers to the 24th of May have), that he had *one third of the members present* to vote with him for a *committee*. To be sure he had! This just suited his views, and also the views of the Ministers. He wanted support at the end of a long speech, and they wanted the appearance of a fair discussion of the question, and a delusive procrastination put into practice. Oh, well! Come! *One third* vote "with Sir Francis. *More* will vote with him, perhaps, another time. If 14 years of motions give *one third*, another 8 years (only 8 years!) will produce a *majority*!" When old canting John talked of his crumbs of comfort for the chickens of the Covenant," he was answered by a fellow in the aisle of the Chapel, by an observation, that it would be much better to give them the whole loaf at once. "No," said John "for chickens are very silly things, and would not know what to do with it." So appears Sir Francis to think of the Reformers. But, I can assure him and the Boroughmongers too, that the People are not *now* to be deluded and noodled along by any such means. The People know as well as he does, that the voting for a *committee* is not voting for a *Reform*; but that, in fact, it is voting *against a Reform*; and, when we come to look at the list of this famous *one third*, we shall find it chiefly composed of Boroughmongers, or the heirs or representatives of Boroughmongers; and, that there were but *two or three* men, who would really vote for a *Reform*. Nay, I am sure I shall find

men voting for the *Committee*, who, in their speeches, reprobated the Reformers, and declared their abhorrence of what alone we call *Reform*. What a despicable farce, then, was the exhibition upon this occasion! and how heartily must the People despise it!

The other prominent act to which I have alluded above, is Sir Francis's speech at the Westminster Dinner, on the 23d of May, being the anniversary of his first election for Westminster. This dinner, of the *original occasion* of which I shall another time, perhaps, find it necessary to give the real history, and as to which I shall only say, at present, that a full proof was then given that Sir Francis would possess no eminence as the *associate of another*; this dinner is ordered and arranged by a committee of persons, who are in the constant practice of consulting Sir Francis as to all their acts in that capacity. Therefore, last year, when I made, at this dinner, a sort of proposition to defeat the intrigue going on between the committee and Mr. Brougham, and which did defeat it, too, I thought it necessary to say to Sir Francis, before we went into the dining-room, "I am going to do something, and if I do not tell you what it is, it is because I wish to keep you clear of being a party to it, and to beg that you will do in it just what you please, without any considerations with regard to myself."

Upon looking over these dinner proceedings again, I perceive, that I cannot do justice to them in the remnant of a letter. I will, therefore, reserve them for another number, in my next letter to you, and shall only add here that nothing in the world would give me so much satisfaction as to find that Sir Francis Burdett's *protection of the imprisoned men*, or their families, has compensated, in some degree, for his abandonment of us all: but that protection, to satisfy me, must be *real and efficient*. Vague, declaratory speeches, however long, and however loud, are not the things that are wanted. What ought to be done, I have pointed out in my last numbers; what is there proposed is barely what justice demands; it is in the power of *any* member of parliament, who has

two thousand pounds, and who has only very moderate talents; and, if it be not done by this gentleman, I shall entertain not the smallest hope of any thing good from him.

I am always your faithful friend,

WM. COBBETT.

P. S. I have now just received English papers to the 19th of May. But I am told that papers of the 9th or 10th of June have been received at Philadelphia, and that they give an account of the acquittal of Mr. WOOLLER, the Author of "*The Black Dwarf*." If the circumstances are correctly stated to me, this is a most glorious triumph indeed, in more respects than one. It shows that, where a jury is ventured upon, all is not yet lost. It shows that the public feeling is not yet wholly benumbed. These jurymen, whose

honoured names I am anxious to see, deserve more at our hands than ten thousand makers of flaming, and vague and pointless and fruitless harangues. The event is, too, of vast importance, as Mr. WOOLLER is, it appears, another of the "*Lower Orders*." I am told, that he is a printer, and has been a common sailor, as I was a common soldier. His being angry with me for what his anxiety led him to view as a "*desertion*" I excuse; and, I hope, that he is before now convinced, that I took the patriotic as well as the prudent course. Be this as it may, I hold his exertions and his talents in honour; and, I trust, that he is destined to see insolent pride and powerful cruelty crouching at his feet. He has youth, and, if he take care of his health, this he will certainly live to see. W. C.

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